

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11  
OMB-01 TRSE-00 /067 W  
-----043233 260941Z /10  
R 260833Z JUN 78  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6750

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E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: PINT TH  
SUBJECT: POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVITY

REF: A) BANGKOK 14863 B) BANGKOK 7974

SUMMARY: INFORMAL POLITICAL MANEUVERING CONTINUES AS NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BEGINS TO REVIEW FIRST DRAFT OF NEW CONSTITUTION, WHICH WAS PUBLISHED JUNE 23. ALTHOUGH POLITICAL PARTIES ARE STILL LEGALLY DISSOLVED, GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN NO STEPS TO DISCOURAGE INFORMAL MEETINGS AND DIALOG AMONG POLITICIANS. QUESTIONS ABOUT PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK'S PLANS TO ENTER POLITICS REMAIN UNANSWERED. NO CLEAR FAVORITE HAS YET TO EMERGE AS DEMOCRAT PARTY LEADER. THAI NATION PARTY BEGINNING TO MAKE PREPARATIONS FOR ELECTIONS. KHUKRIT PRAMOT AND THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY GROUP ARE LESS ACTIVE. NEW FORCE PARTY LACKS SUFFICIENT BACKING TO BE SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT IN ELECTED PARLIAMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. WITH THE FIRST DRAFT OF A CONSTITUTION WHICH IS DESIGNED TO RESTORE REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT TO THAILAND NOW BEFORE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, POLITICAL FIGURES ARE CAUTIOUSLY GEARING UP TO MEET THE PROMISE OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. ALTHOUGH FORMAL POLITICAL

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ACTIVITY REMAINS LEGALLY PROSCRIBED, WORKING LEVEL GROUPS IN THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR ARE CURRENTLY DRAFTING AN ELECTION LAW AND A POLITICAL PARTIES BILL WHICH WILL REPORTEDLY BE SUBMITTED TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY LATER IN THE YEAR (REF A). MOST OBSERVERS ANTICIPATE THAT IT WILL TAKE THE TRG AT LEAST FOUR MONTHS TO RATIFY THE NEW CONSTITUTION. FOLLOWING

RATIFICATION OF THE CONSTITUTION IN NOVEMBER OR DECEMBER, THE GOVERNMENT IS THEN EXPECTED TO REVOKE NARC ORDERS RESTRICTING POLITICAL ACTIVITY, ENACT THE ELECTION LAW AND LEGALIZE POLITICAL PARTIES. UNDER THIS SCENARIO, PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD IN EARLY 1979, ALTHOUGH AS RECENTLY AS JUNE 23 PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK TOLD US PRIVATELY THAT ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD IN DECEMBER, 1978. HOWEVER, IT IS CLEAR THAT KRIANGSAK DOES NOT FULLY CONTROL THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS NOTED ABOVE.

2. IN THE MEANTIME INFORMAL POLITICAL MANEUVERING CONTINUES WITH NO INTERFERENCE FROM THE GOVERNMENT. ALTHOUGH IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO OFFER MORE THAN TENTATIVE SUGGESTIONS AS TO THE UNTIMATE ALIGNMENT OF POLITICAL PARTIES, TWO ISSUES BEAR WATCHING:  
(A) THE ROLE OF PRIME MINISTER KRIANGSAK, AND  
(B) JOCKEYING FOR LEADERSHIP OF THE DEMOCRAT PARTY.

3. KRIANGSAK HAS NOT INDICATED PUBLICLY WHETHER HE INTENDS TO RUN FOR PARLIAMENT IN AN EFFORT TO RETAIN POWER. THE NEW CONSTITUTION IS NOT EXPECTED TO REQUIRE THE PRIME MINISTER TO BE CHOSEN FROM AMONG MPS. HOWEVER, THERE HAVE BEEN SUGGESTIONS THAT, FOLLOWING HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE ARMY ON SEPTEMBER 30, THE PRIME MINISTER WILL SEEK TO ASSOCIATE HIMSELF WITH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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A POLITICAL GROUPING WHICH COULD SUPPORT HIS POLITICAL AMBITIONS AND PARLAY HIS WIDESPREAD POPULAR ACCEPTANCE INTO ELECTORAL VICTORY AND POSITIONS OF INFLUENCE FOR HIS SUPPORTERS IN THE NEXT GOVERNMENT. ODDS ARE THAT KRIANGSAK WILL BE MOST ATTRACTED TO AN ALLIANCE WHICH WOULD DRAW FINANCIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT FROM THE BACKERS OF THE FORMER SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY, RETIRED AIR CHIEF MARSHAL THAWI CHUNLASAP AND PRASOERT RUCHIRAWONG, AND INCLUDE LIBERALS WHO COULD BURNISH ITS PROGRESSIVE IMAGE AND BROADEN THE PARTY'S APPEAL IN URBAN CONSTITUENCIES.

4. DEMOCRATS CONTINUE TO BACK AND FILL, WAITING FOR A NEW PARTY LEADER TO EMERGE FROM THE RANKS. FAVORITES AT THIS STAGE INCLUDE EX-FOREIGN

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MINISTER PHICHAIRATTAKUN, FORMER PARTY SECRETARY-GENERAL DAMRONG LATTHIPHIPHAT AND EX-SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES UTHAI PIMCHAICHON (REF B). AS THAILAND'S LARGEST AND OLDEST POLITICAL PARTY, THE DEMOCRATS SHOULD ONCE AGAIN POSE A FORMIDABLE ELECTORAL CHALLENGE. THE POSITION OF PARTY LEADER COULD BECOME HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT. IF, AS IN THE ELECTIONS OF 1975 AND 1976, THE DEMOCRATS EMERGE AS THE LARGEST SINGLE PARTY, THE PARTY LEADER WOULD BECOME A LOGICAL FAVORITE TO BE NAMED PRIME MINISTER.

5. OTHER FORMER POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE REPORTEDLY UNDERTAKEN PRELIMINARY ORGANIZATIONAL MOVES. IN A RECENT PRESS INTERVIEW LIKIT HONGLADAROM (SON OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SUNTHON AND SECRETARY TO THE FORMER THAI NATION PARTY LEADER PRAMAN ADIREKSAN) SAID THAT THAI NATION PARTY ELEMENTS ARE "DEEP INTO PREPARATION FOR ANY POSSIBLE POLL NEXT YEAR." THAI NATION PARTY REPORTEDLY OUTSPENT ALL OTHER PARTIES IN THE 1976 ELECTION AND CAN ONCE AGAIN COUNT ON STRONG FINANCIAL BACKING FROM PRAMAN'S INDUSTRIAL GROUP AND INFLUENTIAL BANKING CIRCLES. EX-FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN HAS REPORTEDLY INDICATED HE WILL SERVE AS A PARTY ORGANIZER BUT WILL NOT RUN FOR ELECTION.

6. THE FORMER SOCIAL ACTION PARTY (SAP) AND THE NEW FORCE PARTY HAVE BEEN LESS ACTIVE. A FORMER MEMBER (UNIDENTIFIED BY NAME)  
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OF SAP'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WAS RECENTLY QUOTED IN THE PRESS AS SAYING THERE HAS BEEN NO MOVE BY THE PARTY'S TOP ECHELON TO REGROUP. HOWEVER, "SOME LOWER-RANKING FORMER PARTY MEMBERS HAVE BEEN KEEPING CONTACT AND TALKING." EX-SAP LEADER KHUKRIT PRAMOT HAS NOT YET INDICATED THE EXTENT TO WHICH HE PLANS TO TAKE PART IN POLITICS. FORMER NEW FORCE PARTY MEMBERS APPEAR DOUBTFUL ABOUT

THE PROSPECTS OF RESURRECTING THEIR PARTY. ACCORDING TO A PRESS  
INTERVIEW WITH EX-NEW FORCE SECRETARY SUBSAENG PROMBUN, MANY FORMER  
PARTY MEMBERS HAVE BECOME BORED WITH THE CONCEPT OF WESTERN-STYLE  
DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT, MAKING IT DOUBTFUL THAT NEW FORCE COULD  
FIND SUFFICIENT BACKING TO COMPETE IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS.  
SUBSAENG'S PREDECESSOR AS NEW FORCE SECRETARY GENERAL,  
PRAMOTE NAKONTHAB, HAS INDICATED TO US PRIVATELY THAT HE IS STILL  
CONSIDERING WHETHER TO RUN IN THE ELECTIONS. HE CLEARLY HAS NO  
RPT NO ENTHUSIASM FOR WHAT HE EVIDENTLY FEARS WILL BE A LOSING  
EFFORT. COMMENT: SERIOUS MANEUVERS LEADING TO FORMAL POLITICAL  
ALIGNMENT ARE NOT LIKELY TO OCCUR UNTIL THE SHAPE OF THE NEW  
CONSTITUTION BEGINS TO EMERGE FROM ITS MASSAGING AT THE  
HANDS OF THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY AND THE TIMING OF  
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IS MORE CLEARLY DEFINED.  
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## Message Attributes

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